

The Mysterious Monogram

By Howard P. Rocky
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Continued Chapter VI.

"Right!" Farndale agreed, and hurried off at once.

"She will be all right in a few moments—as soon as you can get some smelling salts," Adele said to Harcourt. "We'll explain to her father, and I'll keep her with me for the night."

"That will be splendid," Harcourt assented, shifting uneasily as he spoke. "I'll wait about within call—unless I can do something now—but I think it best that she does not see me again tonight."

Adele glanced at him. Woman's intuition told her that something unusual had occurred, but she made no comment. "Are you sure she will not ask for you when she revives?" she inquired.

"Perhaps she will," Harcourt agreed, "but nevertheless I think I had better not be here."

Then, as he saw Farndale approaching with Adele's maid, he slipped quietly away, his head in a whirl, divided between anguish and suspicion that he could not put aside.

Making his way out as quickly as he could, he stepped into his car and directed the chauffeur home, swearing softly to himself as he banged the door. "If she is in this plot, whatever it may be," he muttered, "there's nothing left. I might as well give in now, and let myself be trapped properly. At any rate I'll be a raving maniac if this infernal insignia with its horrible suggestion, keeps looming up before me!"

CHAPTER VII.

An Interrupted Visit.

Fergus was in the hallway when Harcourt entered the house.

"Anything for me?" he asked giving the man his hat and cloak.

"Nothing my lord."

"Very well then, Fergus. Go to bed. I shall not need you. My luggage is packed I suppose?"

"Yes, my lord."

"We leave at eleven from Victoria station. Good night."

He walked slowly up the stairs and back to his study. He knew there would be no sleep for him and he wanted to think alone—to arrive, if possible, at some conclusion that would define for him his future course of action.

On the threshold of the room he paused, pushing open the half closed door. There was a faint glow by the big mahogany writing table, and Harcourt fancied that he heard a noise in the far corner of the room. The light he had seen faded away quickly and as he listened all was still. Without a word he touched the electric switch, and as the globes illumined the room he gave an exclamation of surprise.

Bending over the filing cabinet was the figure of a man in evening dress. The man's face was half turned toward Harcourt and as the lights flashed on he gave a little cry of angry surprise. It was Kirshin Kandwehr. A drawer of the cabinet had been forced open, and the prince held in his hand the knife Harcourt had locked up in it.

Quietly Harcourt closed the door behind him and then stepped slowly forward.

"Good evening, your highness," he said with mock courtesy.

The Indian smiled, and his white teeth gleamed beneath his silken mustache.

"Good evening, my lord," he returned with a little bow.

"You pay unexpected visits," Harcourt observed. "May I ask how you reached this room?"

With a wave of his hand, Kandwehr indicated the open window.

"Indeed," said Harcourt. "This is the second time I have had occasion to note that method of entrance—or exit."

Kandwehr smiled again, and it was evident that Harcourt's reference was not unknown to him. You are most observing," he replied in his soft, purring voice.

"Had I known that toy was yours," Harcourt continued with a glance at the knife Kandwehr held, "I should—"

"Doubtless have mentioned the fact to the police," Kandwehr interrupted. "Believe me, my lord, but for the chance discovery of its sheath this afternoon, I should have been delighted to leave it in your possession—especially since you seem to place so high a value upon it." He indicated the open drawer of the filing cabinet.

"Really quite an ingenious hiding place." "It took me some time to discover it after I succeeded in opening the drawer."

"You are well versed in such work?" Harcourt said sarcastically.

"I have the knife."

"Which you will be so good as to place upon the table," said Harcourt. "Pardon me," Kandwehr objected. "I shall do nothing of the sort."

"Am I to be put to the unpleasant necessity of ringing for servants or perhaps telephoning to Scotland Yard?"

"You will do neither," said Kandwehr. "See here, Harcourt, let's get down to business. It's quite evident that you believe I am the murderer of Captain Townshend."

"I suppose such a supposition might be pardoned?"

"Between ourselves—possibly," Kandwehr admitted.

Harcourt crossed quickly to the table and pulled open a drawer in which lay a revolver.

"You won't need that," said Kandwehr calmly as Harcourt drew it out. "If I had wished to kill you I have already had ample opportunity. I have no such desire, however, if you had shown any disposition to be sensible we might have discussed this affair sanely—man to man. But you are in no mood to listen to reason. Therefore I shall not intrude longer. I am going now—not by the window, but by your front door, and you will see me out as you might any other caller."

"Do you suppose for a moment," Harcourt began, "that I shall permit—"

"My dear sir, permit is not the word. I do not suppose anything. I am fully aware that you might turn me over to the police if you wished to do so, charging me with housebreaking and burglary. I do not believe you care to make such charges, however, since it would necessarily follow that the police would discover what I came to secure. Their knowledge of the fact that this knife was in your possession—unmentioned in spite of their questioning—and carefully locked away against possible discovery would hardly tend to strengthen your position just now."

"How about your own?" Harcourt suggested.

"I think my act would bear inspection," Kandwehr answered. "If you had killed Captain Townshend with a knife belonging to me—I state a purely hypothetical case now—would it not be natural for me to wish that knife out of the way of being found lest I might be implicated in the crime?"

"Quite natural—if such were the case."

Kandwehr leaned towards him across the table, his face set and earnest. "Harcourt," he said seriously. "I tell you I did not kill Townshend—and I do not know who did. I have my suspicions, but that is all. The knife was mine—it is a very old and valuable one that has been in my family for many years. Look at the steel in it!" He bent the blade nearly double against the table top. "Townshend admired it greatly and while he was in my rooms before we went to the Grill club last evening, I presented it to him. He slipped it into the pocket of his dresscoat at the time."

Harcourt watched the man, fascinated. His tone was earnest yet his words seemed absurd.

"You may not believe what I am saying," Kandwehr said, observing the other's doubtful look, "yet I assure you that it is true. How this knife—my gift—came to be the instrument of his death, or whose hand struck the blow, is almost as great a mystery to me as it is to you."

"Do you really expect any one to credit such a story, Kandwehr?"

"No, to be perfectly frank, I am only too well aware of its seeming improbability—yet I can say, no more."

"Perhaps you imagine that I am the guilty man?" Harcourt suggested.

"Under the circumstances such a belief would be quite as reasonable as your unreasoning suspicion of me."

"Granted," said Harcourt. "I myself admitted as much in your presence this morning."

"And you made a mistake in doing so," Kandwehr returned. "I do not know just what your object was. Perhaps you think you may have been guilty. If so, I may say quite positively that I am sure you are not Townshend's murderer."

"Thank you," said Harcourt mockingly.

"You are still suspicious of me," Kandwehr went on. "You all are, I can see that readily. Perhaps you are right in feeling as you do. I am a stranger, an Indian, and the ways of my people are strange. You do not understand us, and consequently, you believe us capable of anything. You are making a terrible mistake in trying to fasten this crime upon me. What I know I shall keep locked in my brain. I cannot help you—but I warn you—do not attempt to place suspicion on me."

His eyes flashed and the savage in him arose to the surface as he spoke. For a moment the two men gazed at each other in silence, then Kandwehr calmly slipped the knife into his pocket and moved slowly towards the door.

"As I told you a few minutes ago, I am going now—by the front door. I shall take the knife with me, and before I sleep tonight it will be where it can do no more harm—to you, to me, or to any other unfortunate man."

"You believe that the disappearance of this knife will protect us?" Harcourt asked.

"To a great extent, yes. The police will never be able to fasten the crime upon you. Without the knife they cannot produce evidence against me. The dagger, therefore, is a source of danger to both of us, for its discovery will implicate you as well as me. In that event I might be obliged, for self protection, to tell where I found it."

"Would you also mention just how it came into my possession?" Harcourt asked with a smile.

"Not being a seer—even though I am an Indian—I should be unable to throw any light upon the subject," said Kandwehr. "I can only add that I do not intend to be accused of this crime myself, for, whether you believe me or not, I am innocent of it."

"Kandwehr," said Harcourt, "you know far more about this than you are willing to tell. You seem over-confident of my safety, as well as of your own. Does your determination to remain silent go so far that you would let an innocent man pay the penalty for a crime he did not commit?"

The Indian did not answer at once. Then he spoke in a low tone, as though he feared that someone other than Harcourt might catch his words.

"When I see an innocent man in danger I shall tell what I know," he said solemnly. "Until then my lips are sealed."

He stood by the door now, waiting. "Will you see me out as I suggest?"

For a moment Harcourt hesitated. What part had this man played in the events of the past twenty-four hours—what did he know of the mysterious monogram that had haunted Harcourt ever since his first discovery of the knife the Indian had come to steal. He knew that Kandwehr could tell him what he wished to know—if he would. But he realized that any questioning would be in vain and his own position in the matter forbade his trying to force the information he sought.

"It will probably be better that my servants should not know of your having been here," Harcourt said. "I will go down with you myself."

Kandwehr bowed and walked out. Silently Harcourt followed him down the stairs and himself let him out at the main entrance of the house. Without even a word of farewell, the great door closed behind the Indian, and Harcourt, more puzzled than ever, returned to his study.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Suspect Arrested.

Alone on the steps outside, Kandwehr waited while he heard Harcourt set the chain within. The trees in the park, shaded the house from the glare of the arc light at the corner, and he stood in the sheltering darkness for a moment, looking cautiously up and down the now deserted street.

Then he slipped quickly down the steps and hurried off at a rapid pace.

Once he looked back and saw no one, but when he had passed along a little way, a figure emerged from the shadows of a doorway opposite and followed slowly, halting now and then behind convenient shelters, lest Kandwehr should turn again and observe him.

Kandwehr, hastening his footsteps now, quickly turned the corner, and the man who followed hurried after him. The fog was growing thicker, and the chance of discovery growing less and less, the pursuer came closer in the fear that Kandwehr might elude him in the gray mist.

There were but few persons abroad, and those who passed glanced suspiciously at the figure in evening clothes, with his inners wrapped tightly about him, hurrying silently along through the haze. Now the jingle of a hansom bell came faintly to Kandwehr's ears, and once the horn of a taxicab warned him just in time to avoid the thing that suddenly loomed up out of the fog at a street crossing.

Still the man behind him—now only a few paces away—came stealthily on, never risking for a moment any chance of losing sight of the Indian.

But he made no effort to overtake him, his object apparently being to discover Kandwehr's destination.

At last Kandwehr came to the river and walked briskly along the embankment. The toll of a bell rang out loudly through the stillness, and he paused to look over the river wall. It was black and chill below, and he shivered as he thought of being enveloped in the water's depths.

For a moment he stood leaning against the masonry. Then he drew the dagger from the folds of his cloak and looked at it for a moment. His arm shot up and the long, slender blade flashed wickedly in the faint light of a nearby lamp. With a smile, Kandwehr drew back his arm to throw it out over the dark, dirty water as it flowed quickly by.

As he did so a muttered sentence in a strange language escaped him, but before he could hurl away the knife a strong hand gripped his arm. With a deft twist, his wrist was turned back, and the blade dropped from his fingers, clattering upon the stone pavement at his feet.

With a snarl he turned his head and looked into the determined eyes of a thick set man in a plaid mackintosh, a man of unusual strength whose grip still held him a prisoner.

"Not so fast, your highness," said the man with a grin. "I think Mac-Bee will like to have that knife."

"Who are you?" Kandwehr demanded, his gaze turning from the weapon on the pavement to the face of the stranger.

"Barney is the name," the man replied. "And Scotland Yard the address. I think you'd better be coming there with me now, sir."

"You mean that I am under arrest?"

"I'm afraid so, sir. If you'll just step along a short distance I think I can find a night hawk with a cab, sir."

Still holding fast to Kandwehr's wrist, Barney stooped down and picked up the dagger.

"You needn't break my wrist bones," said Kandwehr with a grimace. "I shan't attempt to run away."

(To be continued)

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